



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Necedah National Wildlife Refuge

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Project Update

December 2004

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Receives Final Approval

In December 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced the availability of the comprehensive conservation plan for Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

The comprehensive conservation plan, or CCP, is intended to outline how the Refuge will fulfill its legal purpose and contribute to the National Wildlife Refuge System's wildlife, habitat and public use goals. The plan articulates management goals for the next 15 years and specifies the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals. While the planned future condition is long-term, we anticipate that the plan will be updated every 5 to 10 years based on information gained through monitoring habitat and wildlife, as well as recreational usage.

The 43,696-acre Refuge is a mix of pine, oak and aspen forests, wetlands and open water areas, grasslands, and rare savannas. This mixture of habitats supports a rich diversity of fish, wildlife and plant populations. More than 230 species of birds have been identified on the Refuge. More than 100,000 migratory waterfowl and shorebirds use the Refuge annually, and it is the largest stopover in the State for migrating Sandhill Cranes. With the surrounding Necedah Wildlife Management Area, it has one of Wisconsin's largest colonies of Black Terns, a state-listed endangered species.

The Refuge attracts people as well as wildlife. About 160,000 people visit the Refuge every year to hunt, fish, hike, observe and photograph wildlife, and to pick berries.

Major achievements expected to occur over the life of the plan include savanna and grassland habitat restoration, protection of mature forests, and wetland restoration. Management tools that will be used to accomplish these objectives will include prescribed burning, water level manipulation, timber harvesting, and mowing. These



management activities will benefit not only common wildlife such as the white-tailed deer, Ruffed Grouse, and waterfowl, but will also benefit less abundant species such as Goshawks, Bald Eagles, wolves and two federally listed endangered species, the Karner blue butterfly and the Whooping Crane.

To accomplish the activities outlined in the CCP, Necedah NWR will continue to build partnerships with government agencies, non-profit groups, and the public. Necedah NWR's involvement in reestablishment of a migratory population of Whooping Cranes is an excellent example of a project made possible by an international partnership that has resulted in an economic boom for the area.

Necedah NWR aims to exceed visitor expectations and enhance visitor experiences on the Refuge in the next 15 years. Specifically, the Plan includes expanding and enhancing accessible hiking trails and observation platforms, building a visitor center that will enhance learning opportunities for students and other visitors, replace wayside kiosks and expand portable exhibits, and



continue to provide education supplies, media, brochures and other resources to community schools. People will continue to receive the Refuge's messages through radio, television, and written media. The Refuge will provide opportunities for the public to participate in conservation activities on the ground whether through the Friends group or through the Refuge volunteer program.

Necedah NWR will continue its long history of building strong partnerships to make restorations and wildlife habitat management also a reality for individual landowners. Landowners interested in receiving technical expertise and assistance for habitat management on their property should contact the Refuge at 608-565-2551.

Where You Can Find the CCP

The CCP is available online at <http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/Necedah/index.html>, and copies are also available by calling Refuge staff at 608/565-2551 or writing to the Refuge Manager at:

Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
W7996 20th Street West
Necedah, WI 54646

Copies are also available in libraries in communities surrounding the Refuge.

The Planning Process

The Necedah CCP effort began in 1997 with internal scoping of the issues among Refuge and Regional Office staff. Public involvement has been an important part of this

process. Refuge staff met with groups and individuals, and a variety of open houses and public meetings were held to gather public comment. Federal, state and local agencies were involved in scoping the issues that would be addressed in the CCP. Three draft CCPs were released for public review, the first in 1998, the second in 2000 and the third in 2001.

The following is a summary of major issues that are addressed in the goals, objectives, and strategies developed in the CCP:

- Service trust resources: What effect will Refuge management actions have on listed species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, and biological diversity?
- Refuge visitor services: What effect will Refuge management actions have on the quality of visitor services provided at the Refuge, namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation?
- Habitat management: What effect will Refuge habitat management actions have on the quantity and quality of habitats within the Refuge and the Refuge watershed, namely the wetlands, forests, and open landscapes?
- The Yellow River Focus Area: How will Refuge management actions affect the habitat in the Yellow River Focus Area, and how will those management actions impact private property rights and the area's tax base?

Who We Are and What We Do

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Our specific responsibilities include enforcing federal wildlife laws, managing migratory bird populations, restoring nationally significant fisheries, administering the Endangered Species Act, and restoring wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The mission of the Service is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service's role also includes managing the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. The System is a network of more than 540 national wildlife refuges encompassing more than 93 million acres of public land and water. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and

their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Refuges are also unique places for people. When it is compatible with wildlife and habitat needs and the purpose for which the refuge was established, they can be used for wildlife-dependent activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and environmental interpretation.

Refuge Complex Goals

The CCP established clear goals for Necedah NWR over the next 15 years. Objectives for achieving each goal and strategies for achieving each objective are detailed in the CCP. Goals for the Refuge are:

- *Goal 1:* The Refuge will actively conserve, restore, establish and manage diverse and productive populations of waterfowl and other migratory birds within the Refuge and the Yellow River Focus Area, with an emphasis on regional and national species of management concern.
- *Goal 2:* The Refuge will provide a federal leadership role in the preservation, recovery, and where appropriate the reintroduction of federally listed species (e.g. Karner blue butterfly, Whooping Crane, Eastern timber wolf, Eastern massasauga rattlesnake, Bald Eagle) throughout central Wisconsin over the life of the CCP.
- *Goal 3:* The Refuge will, in partnership with others, conserve, restore, establish and manage diverse and productive wetland, open landscape, and forest habitats on Refuge land and within the Yellow River Focus Area that benefits listed species, waterfowl and other migratory birds, and native biological diversity.
- *Goal 4:* The Refuge will, in partnership with others, conserve Refuge resources (e.g. fish and wildlife, cultural and archaeological, water and visitor experiences) for future generations.
- *Goal 5:* Quality scientific research and monitoring will guide Refuge management decision making.
- *Goal 6:* Strong, long-term, mutually-beneficial working relationships with Refuge stakeholders will lead to healthy sustainable fish and wildlife populations within the Refuge and the Yellow River Focus Area.
- *Goal 7:* The Refuge will provide the public quality wildlife-dependent uses of the Refuge (e.g. wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation) to foster the public's understanding and appreciation of the Refuge, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and Service trust resources, and to expand the role the public plays in their stewardship within the Refuge and the Yellow River Focus Area.
- *Goal 8:* Necedah NWR will be a safe and healthy environment for employees, volunteers and visitors and will be proactive in addressing a wide-range of conservation opportunities and issues.
- *Goal 9:* Technically skilled and diverse employees with high morale and job satisfaction will achieve high levels of stakeholder satisfaction.

Management Direction

In the next 15 years, management of the Refuge will focus on achieving the following conditions:

Waterfowl and Other Migratory Birds: We intend to increase the breeding pair population of waterfowl on the Refuge to 700 pairs through additional grassland habitat management. We plan to eliminate Wood Duck houses on the Refuge in favor of natural nesting cavities; the Refuge will maintain existing Wood Duck houses until they become

unusable. With additional grassland habitat, we hope to increase the breeding pair population of grassland species of concern, including Dickcissel, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow and Bobolink. We also intend to increase the breeding pair population of savanna species of concern by providing more savanna habitat. Species of concern include Red-headed Woodpeckers, Field Sparrows and Northern Flicker. We also

intend to increase the number of Black Tern nesting pairs to eight. We will provide habitat for Goshawk, which occasionally nest on the Refuge.



Listed Species: We will establish and maintain one large Karner blue butterfly population on the Refuge. We will provide technical assistance and staff support to the Whooping Crane Reintroduction Program. We will conserve resident packs of Eastern timber wolves. We will strive to protect Bald Eagles from disturbance. We will continue international management efforts for the Eastern massasauga rattlesnake, including research, in an effort to preclude the need for federal listing of the species.

Native Biological Diversity: We will manage for biological diversity by restoring and managing additional wetland, grassland and savanna habitats on the Refuge and within the Yellow River Focus Area. Work in the Yellow River Focus Area will include continuing to restore wetlands, grasslands, savanna and forest through the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Visitor Services: In the next 15 years, we will expand wildlife observation, photography, fishing, education, interpretation, and outreach programs. We will continue existing small-game and deer hunting programs on the Refuge until studies can identify the number of hunters that can safely hunt on the Refuge. We will make significant strides in improving visitor facilities, including building a visitor center, building an observation tower, developing additional off-road parking areas, developing a fishing pier on Harvey's Pond, completing the Ellen Allan Outdoor Learning Center, developing new signage that helps visitors navigate the Refuge, and developing 5 miles of additional trails.

Habitat Management: We intend to maintain 23,500 acres of wetlands on Refuge land to support waterfowl and bird species of concern, such as Black Terns, American Bittern, Henslow's Sparrow and Sedge Wren. Forested wetlands and open water areas will remain about the same, and we intend to reduce the amount of mixed deciduous and coniferous forest by 5,500 acres. We intend to increase the amount of grassland and savanna on the Refuge by 2,600 acres and 3,500 acres respectively. We expect an increase in grassland to benefit waterfowl such as Mallard, Teal and Pintail, and increased savanna will benefit Dickcissel, Upland Sandpipers, Grasshopper Sparrows and Bobolink. We will benefit Goshawks by maintaining 550 acres of coniferous forest habitat, and we will maintain 4,500 acres of mixed deciduous and coniferous forest habitat to benefit species such as Pine Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Whip-poor-will and Black-and-white Warblers. By maintaining 5,350 acres

of broad-leaf deciduous forest on the Refuge, we will benefit species such as the Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Wood Thrush.

Yellow River Focus Area: Cooperative agreements facilitating conservation will be the first priority within the entire 21,982-acre Yellow River Focus Area. If a landowner is only interested in outright sale of his or her property, the Service will consider acquisition only if there are funds available and only if the land falls within the 14,683-acre Juneau County portion of the Focus Area.

Over the next 15 years, approximately 3,000 acres of wetlands, uplands, and riparian areas could be conserved by the Service through a broad range of agreements with willing landowners. These arrangements include providing technical assistance, voluntary partnership agreements, conservation easements and fee acquisition of land. We will acquire the minimum amount of land necessary to accomplish natural resource goals, and we will only buy land from willing sellers. We will not request land acquisition money for the project until 2006. Assuming that we have both funding and willing sellers, we anticipate that land acquisition would occur at the rate of approximately 250 acres a year. We will continue to develop Wildlife Management Agreements with willing landowners in the Yellow River Focus Area.



Into the Future

Throughout the comprehensive conservation planning process, many people have contributed time and ideas to make the Necedah NWR CCP a better document. We are grateful to everyone who cared enough about the Refuge and its future to participate in this planning effort.

To succeed, a refuge management plan has to adapt to nature's everchanging conditions. Although the plan is complete, we expect to revise it every 5 to 10 years in response to conditions that could not be anticipated in planning. We will continue to welcome your thoughts on Refuge management.

Necedah NWR is a place for both wildlife and people to use and enjoy, now and in the future. We hope that you will continue to care about and participate in conserving the Refuge's wildlife and habitat.